

December 4, 2007

The Honorable Donald Winter  
Secretary of the Navy  
1000 Navy Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Winter:

In anticipation of your pending Letter of Record on an outlying landing field to support the training and deployment of Navy pilots, we want to reiterate our concerns regarding this proposed facility.

After hearing from residents and local officials in the potentially affected communities, we conclude that many North Carolinians not only do not want an OLF in their area, but they also harbor considerable doubts about the need for this facility. The service currently is basing its justification for this facility on the need for additional training capacity; however, as recently as this spring, the service had cited growing encroachment problems at NAS Oceana and OLF Fentress as the reason it needed an OLF. Naturally, this shift by the Navy has only heightened concerns and increased skepticism.

While we are aware that the Navy's recently adopted six-plus-one surge doctrine may place some measure of stress on existing training capacity, we do not understand how encroachment could have been such a pressing issue just months ago, but now has apparently become a minor and receding concern. We respectfully ask that you explain the specifics underpinning this change and how the new doctrine necessitates increased training capacity.

Furthermore, in response to our suggestions that associated economic benefits may help bolster local support for an OLF, you have stated that the addition of two F/A-18E/F Super Hornet squadrons at MCAS Cherry Point would inject approximately \$30 million per squadron per year into the local economy. While this is no doubt true and welcomed by the state and the surrounding area, we emphasize that the distance between Cherry Point and the four latest, relevant locations in Gates and Camden Counties is nearly 120 miles. In other words, the communities in the northeast region of our state would see little to no benefits to outweigh the negative attributes of a jet landing strip in their backyards. We offer that another facility closer to Cherry Point might be more acceptable to residents.

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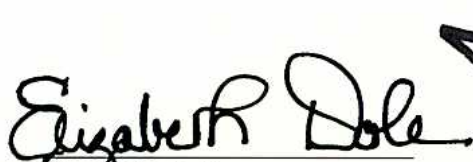

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North Carolinians properly take great pride in our state's pro-military stance and support for our men and women in uniform. That said, residents rightfully approach this project, given its long and contentious history and how it would fundamentally change their quality of life, with significant reservations.

The Washington County site is universally opposed and should not be considered as a viable option. In addition, residents in Gates and Camden Counties have been unequivocal, especially given the burden to economic benefit ratio, in their opposition to an OLF. We take the position that if an outlying landing field were to be located in North Carolina, the Navy must work more effectively to secure the general support of the local population, and we see little purpose in your pending announcement of a narrowed list unless the issue of economic benefits for the affected communities is squarely addressed.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,

  
Elizabeth Dole  
United States Senator  
Richard Burr  
United States Senator  
Michael Easley  
Governor, North Carolina